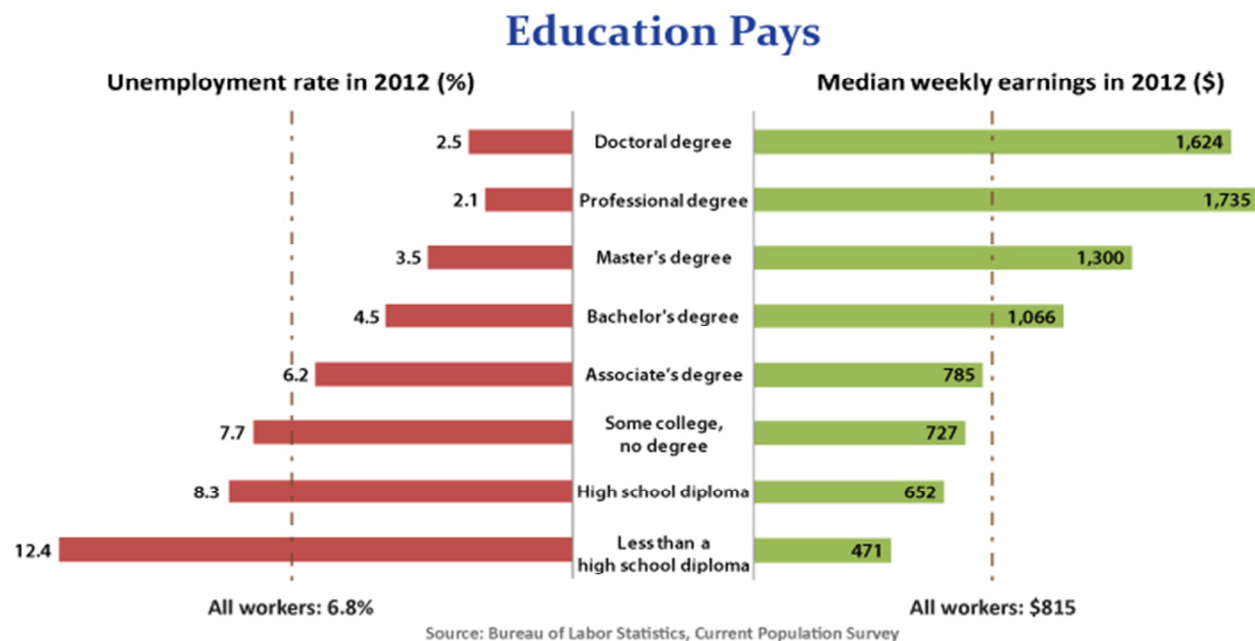


## *Arizona Next STEPS (Support and Transition to Employment and Postsecondary Success)*

This year our Council adopted the goal of partnering with individuals with developmental disabilities, their families, others who support them and employers, to advocate and expand capacity for community integrated employment. The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reported that in January 2010, the percentage of people with disabilities in the labor force was 21.8% compared with 70.1% for persons with no disability

Concern over unemployment hasn't been this strong across our country since the last great recession. In the education community the connection between postsecondary education and improved employment outcomes has been well documented and discussed. The research is indisputable that those with greater postsecondary education completion fare better in the workforce and have fared better in this recession.



[http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep\\_chart\\_001.htm](http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_chart_001.htm)

Although the same is true for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IID) the same level of understanding and commitment toward improved goals is still lacking.

*Data from the national vocational rehabilitation database (RSA 911) show that youth with ID who participated in post-secondary education were 26% more likely to leave vocational rehabilitation services with a paid job and earn a 73% higher weekly income. Despite positive employment outcomes for*

*youth with ID who receive postsecondary education services, the percentage of youth who receive these services as part of their Individualized Plan for Employment is low. In 2007, a total of 36,154 youth with ID who entered vocational rehabilitation services between the ages of 16–26 left vocational rehabilitation services. Of these individuals, 1,223 (3.4%) participated in some type of postsecondary education and 537 (1.5%) successfully completed a non-degree program, associate degree, vocational/technical certificate, bachelor's degree, or graduate degree program.*

*<http://www.thinkcollege.net/publications/fast-facts> (Fast Facts #1)*

Depending on how disability is defined the unemployment rate varies. “According to the U.S. Department of Labor, only 20 percent of people with disabilities either are employed or are seeking employment compared to 69 percent of the population without disabilities. Of those individuals with disabilities seeking employment, 15 percent have not found employment— compared to 8 percent for everyone else.”

*(<http://www.nga.org/files/live/sites/NGA/files/pdf/CI1213BETTERBOTTOMLINE.PDF>)*

A comprehensive employment strategy for individuals with developmental disabilities to increase the abyssal un- and under-employment rate simply must contain a plan to increase postsecondary access and educational attainment levels in both in quality and quantity.

The past four years have seen unprecedented policy changes at the federal level aimed at supporting and dramatically increasing postsecondary education.

*The Higher Education Opportunity Act (P.L. 110-315) (HEOA) was enacted on August 14, 2008 and it reauthorized the Higher Education Act of 1965. This law contains a number of important new provisions that will improve access to postsecondary education for students with intellectual disabilities. Of particular note are several provisions that address financial aid and that create a new model demonstration program and coordinating center for students with intellectual disabilities*

*<http://www.ahead.org/uploads/2009/Concurrent%20Block%204/4.4%20Handout%201.pdf>*

*This need will be addressed, to some extent, by the provisions in the Higher Education Opportunities Act (HEOA) Amendments of 2008, which created the first definition of a comprehensive transition and postsecondary program for students with intellectual disabilities. The HEOA definition includes the requirement that such programs provide opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities to participate in coursework and other activities with students without disabilities. <http://www.thinkcollege.net/publications/fast-facts> (Fast Facts #2)*

## NEED FOR SUPPORT

The research is also clear that postsecondary success is dramatically increased when students have support and guidance, hence the development of college access programs. Many of these programs specialize in underrepresented students, which are typically thought of as low-income, and/or minority students.

Arizona has the opportunity to be a national leader and create the vision for college access programs serving students with developmental disabilities.

Since 1995 hundreds of these organizations across the country have coalesced to form the National College Access Network (NCAN). NCAN summarizes the dilemma particularly well, however doesn't contemplate the additional layer of complexity a student with IDD faces.

*In today's economy, a college degree is in greater demand than ever before. Unfortunately, issues such as rising tuition costs and confusion about complex college admission and financial aid processes keep many qualified students from entering college. Many of those who do enroll face additional challenges finding the support and resources they need to graduate. These factors have left today's young Americans less likely to obtain college degrees than members of their parents' generation.*

*The National College Access Network (NCAN) works to reverse this growing college opportunity gap. At NCAN, we unite the key organizations dedicated to increasing college access and success. With our members and partners, we develop and support programs and policy solutions that help more students enter and complete college and other postsecondary training.*

*All students, regardless of income, age, race, or ethnicity, deserve an equal opportunity for a college education. Underrepresented students often must navigate the college pathway without adequate financial resources, guidance, or a strong college-going culture in their high schools. NCAN works to overcome these barriers so students can gain the postsecondary credentials they need to embark on successful careers and build America's future.*

*[http://www.collegeaccess.org/About\\_NCAN](http://www.collegeaccess.org/About_NCAN)*

One of the advantages of a college access program is that it is more student-centered. Campus-centered programs are at-risk when funding sources deplete or supportive

administrators depart. A college access program is by definition person-centered and embraces Arizona's school choice spirit. The organization would support students regardless of their postsecondary choice and could have the same grant-writing and fund-raising capabilities as other college access programs. Furthermore, it would facilitate the achievement of statewide participation goals more quickly, by being able to support more students faster.

Finally, this facilitates the possibility, the dream, of students entering campus simply as students, not enrollees in a special program, or even worse the perception that special education is being re-created in higher education.

## **PROPOSED RESEARCH**

The surveys and studies that have been done indicate that individuals with DD have a low participation rate and even lower persistence and success rate in postsecondary education. To understand this phenomena, and what can be done to improve it, the Developmental Disabilities Council would like to conduct a needs assessment of postsecondary access and educational attainment levels of individuals with DD. Anecdotal it is believed that many students with DD take advantage of postsecondary opportunities across Arizona. To accurately assess this, a thorough needs assessment of the subject can identify the current conditions and the gaps where services may be needed.

A thorough data gathering process through surveys, forums, and focus groups of institutions, educators and students will also help the Council to achieve its primary goal of continuous communication with the community and their needs both urban and rural.

The Council would like to do a thorough review of the subject beginning with the current state of affairs to the dreams and hopes of young children and their families for their future. This assessment must include not only the availability of options but the preparation of students for them as well as their overall persistence and success.

Researchers and policymakers typically focus on two issues when they discuss postsecondary participation: participation (enrollment) rates and access barriers. *Access* refers to the state or community's responsibility to ensure that students are able to enroll in a postsecondary institution. Policies and strategies developed to increase access for underrepresented groups address individual and structural factors that impact participation. This study seeks to look at both of these plus *preparation* (K-12 transition) and measures of success such as course completion and ultimately preparation for employment.

(The definition of postsecondary is meant to include all coursework or options, vocational and academic, at degree-seeking institutions.)

## Potential Research Questions

| Topics                    | Current State of Affairs   | Barriers   |
|---------------------------|--|--|
| Dreams and Hopes          | <p>What are the dreams and hopes of young children and their families for their future?</p> <p>How is this impacting their IEP and other school plans?</p>   |  |
| Postsecondary Access      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Availability of options</li> <li>-What are the available options?</li> <li>-What is the level of awareness?</li> <li>-What is the level of preparation for postsecondary?</li> <li>- How successful are transition programs?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-What are the barriers to higher education?</li> <li>- entrance requirements?</li> <li>- cost?</li> <li>- location?</li> <li>- fear?</li> </ul> |
| Educational Participation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-How much are clients accessing higher education?</li> <li>-Specific institutions</li> <li>-How many courses</li> <li>-Types of programs</li> <li>-What is the demand?</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-What barriers prevent enrollment or participation?</li> <li>-What would have helped?</li> <li>-What supports were needed?</li> </ul>           |
| Educational Attainment    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-What is their success?</li> <li>-What are the completion rates?</li> <li>- What are students' transition experiences?</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-What would have helped?</li> <li>-What supports were needed?</li> </ul>  |

**Data Collection Methods Selected but Not Limited To:**

- Literature/research review
- Surveys
- Forums
- Focus groups

**Target Participants:**

- Institutions of Higher Education
- Educators
- Students
- Consumers
- Transition specialists
- Disability Resource Centers

The entry into postsecondary education represents a new frontier for students and adults with DD. Fortunately the doors were open by the changes made to the HEOA and roads are already being paved all through the country.

Successful entry into postsecondary will require significant systems change and capacity expansion. The first logical step will be to uncover the current state of the state analyzing Arizona's unique strengths, opportunities, and challenges.

The connection to employment has already been demonstrated which should create a sense of urgency. However, it is also clear from the current NCAN mission statement that students with disabilities haven't historically been envisioned as a traditionally underserved community for college access.

The final deliverable should include a road map for the Council, policymakers, and parents with recommendations. Upon delivery the Council along with the Morrison Institute shall present the findings to the Arizona College Access Network and plan for a series of regional briefings.